DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 048 UD 030 861

AUTHOR Suleiman, Mahmoud F.
TITLE Achieving Congruence between Learning and Teaching Styles in Linguistically Diverse Environments.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Social Science Conference (San Diego, CA, March 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Bilingual Education; *Cognitive Style; *Cultural Awareness; Cultural Differences; Elementary Secondary Education; Language Arts; Minority Groups; *Multicultural Education; *Teaching Styles; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Language Minorities; *Linguistic Pluralism

ABSTRACT

While several studies focus on how students learn, very few focus on how teachers teach. It has been assumed that successful learning is judged by effective teaching. To carry out learning tasks successfully, it is important for students to have multiple learning opportunities and "style-shift" while learning. On the other hand, teachers should achieve a balance between teaching strategies and the students' unique learning styles. Thus, teachers are encouraged to adjust their teaching strategies in light of the different learning styles of the students. This is especially true in today's increasingly diverse classrooms where multiple ways of knowing, learning, and interacting have to be valued and celebrated. The purpose of this paper is to: (1) identify different learning styles of culturally and linguistically diverse students and show how they can be met in language arts instruction; (2) identify strategies for teachers to provide all students with optimal learning opportunities by valuing the learners' preferred ways of learning; and (3) provide pedagogical implications for bilingual and multicultural teachers to achieve congruence between teaching and learning styles in language arts lessons. (Contains 1 figure and 23 references.) (Author)

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ED 395 048

Achieving Congruence Between Learning and Teaching Styles in Linguistically Diverse Environments

by

Mahmoud F. Suleiman, Ph. D.
Assistant Professor
Teacher Education
Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education
Fort Hays State University
Hays, KS 67601

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A Paper Presented at the Annual National Social Science Conference (NSSA), San Diego, CA, March 1995

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ABSTRACT

While several studies focus on how students learn, very few focus on how teachers teach. It has been assumed that successful learning is judged by effective teaching. To successfully carry out learning tasks, it is important for students to have multiple learning opportunities and *style-shift* while learning. On the other hand, teachers should achieve a balance between teaching strategies and the students' unique learning styles; thus, teachers are encouraged to adjust their teaching strategies in light of the different learning styles of the students. This is especially true in today's increasingly diverse classrooms where multiple ways of knowing, learning, and interacting have to be valued and celebrated. The purpose of this paper is to (1) identify different learning styles of culturally and linguistically diverse students and how they can be met in language arts instruction; (2) identify strategies for teachers to provide all students with optimal learning opportunities by valuing the learners' preferred ways of learning; (3) provide pedagogical implications for bilingual/multicultural teachers to achieve congruence between teaching and learning styles in language arts lessons.

Achieving Congruence Between Learning and Teaching Styles in Linguistically Diverse Settings

Mahmoud F. Suleiman
Fort Hays State University

Introduction

It has always been assumed that the learner's cognitive, cultural and linguistic characteristics significantly influence learning. This has become more imperative in today's classrooms given the increasingly linguistic and cultural diversity that impact learning and consequently teaching. Thus, teachers need to be cognizant of the unique learning strategies of all students; this includes individual differences on one hand, and culturally-bound variables and their relationship to learning, on the other. In particular, these cultural and linguistic difference brought to the classroom by linguistically diverse populations must be the axiom upon which educational solutions are to be based. Furthermore, these differences embedded in the learner's value systems, frames of reference, culture, language . . . and the like, ought to be valued and celebrated.

Once teachers become more sensitive to the students' preferred ways of learning and maintain consistency between learning styles and teaching strategies, desired educational outcomes will follow. At the same time, teachers must train their students to learn in a variety of ways consistent with the nature of the learning task by making the necessary adjustment in the curriculum and classroom activities and multiplying learning opportunities for all students.

The literature on learning styles is voluminous. Generally, these research efforts focused on understanding the nature of the cognitive processes as they affect learning. Although a few research efforts have attempted to investigate learning styles in diverse settings, more research is still needed to fully understand how learning takes place in terms of the unique linguistic and cultural variables pertinent to the learner. Also very few

research efforts have attempted to investigate teaching styles in terms of the diversity of learning in individuals representing various cultural and linguistic groups.

Since the role of learning and teaching styles is very crucial in culturally diverse classrooms, and cannot be undermined, this paper examines the role of learning styles that are culture-bound and their implications for teachers and educators. It also explores these issues in an attempt to help teachers create a learning environment congruent with the different needs of their students; possible ways of achieving consistency are presented as well.

Within the framework of equity pedagogy proposed by multiculturalism, this paper offers practical guidelines for teachers to be more effective with all students, and suggests that the school curriculum and teaching strategies must be revised to be more consistent with the cognitive and learning styles of the diverse student populations.

Underlying Assumptions

Defining and understanding learning styles helps both teachers and students to gain more control of their tasks, and "take charge" of the learning/teaching situation. In addition, several assumptions that underlie the discussion of learning and teaching styles in diverse classrooms can be useful. Before we define a learning style and address the relevant issues in teaching and learning, it is important to offer the following underlying assumptions:

1. Understanding cross-cultural differences in learning would help us overcome the difficulty in the diagnosis process of learning styles in culturally diverse classrooms.

2. Cross-cultural differences may pose some problems in accurately assessing learning styles

3. Teaching styles and student learning styles can be identified;

4. Teachers are most helpful when they assist students in learning through their own style preference by multiplying learning opportunities;

5. Students should have the opportunity to learn through their preferred style;

6. Teachers can develop a teaching style which is responsive to the wide variety of students in their classes;

7. Students have the ability to style-shift in learning.

It has been assumed that both teachers and students in linguistically diverse settings come to the classroom "usually unconscious about how learning" takes place (Reid, 1995), and this inevitably leads to frustration on both parts (Kinsella, 1995). However, the assumptions made about the dynamics of learning reflect a process of "cultural programming," whose understanding would help both teachers and students to be more conscious about the nature of learning/teaching tasks (Chisholm, 1994). Having these assumptions in mind would also enhance learning and teaching conducive the linguistic, cultural, cognitive, and social demands of the learning/teaching situation.

Definitions of Learning Styles

The term *learning style* has been defined and revisited in many ways over the years. The concept of cognitive styles is deeply rooted in the neo-behaviorist view of learning. It deals with thought patterns and their relationship to the environmental factors. According to Irvine & York (1995), the term *learning styles* is a generic term that includes "three distinct styles or substyles: cognitive, affective, and physiological" (p. 484). Inherent within this dichotomy are several aspects of learning as they relate to the learners, their culture, language, social and physiological environment.

Having this in mind, Reid (1995) provides an operational definition of learning styles. Reid maintains that *learning style* "refers to an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills" (p. viii). He also divides research on learning styles into cognitive, sensory, and personality aspects of learning styles. The first set discusses the array of sociocultural, linguistic, experiential, and educational factors that can influence the way diverse students learn.

Also, several assessment procedures that may help learners and teachers to manage learning styles in the linguistically diverse environment have been the focus of research to diagnose and identify learning styles (Kinsella, 1995).

For instance, as a result of diagnosing learning styles, learners, in accordance with Kolb's (1984) Model, can be described as Accommodator: one who learns by doing hands-on experiences, action oriented; Converger: one who likes working with ideas and theories, technical problems rather than social problems; Diverger: one who views the situation from different angles, has far reaching interest; and Assimilator: one who likes things in logical order. In short, Kolb's Model divides the learning process into four stages: learning from feeling, learning by watching and listening, learning by thinking, and learning by doing. Although such accounts as these have many pitfalls, they can help practitioners in understanding the complexity of learning and more importantly the implications of these findings to teaching.

In a more pragmatic account, Brown (1987) pointed out that if learning styles involve affective and cognitive factors that range from centering around social interaction, emotional involvement, sensory experiences, to abstract intellectual reasoning, then teachers in linguistically diverse classrooms can draw practical implication for planning instruction. According to Brown (1987), as in Kinsella (1995), various empirical data indicate that students can better their learning by adapting learning styles compatible with the target learning task in diverse settings. For example, the following matrix shows the relationship between defining (or identifying) learning styles and their relationship to teaching. In particular, given the cross-linguistic influences in such settings, it provides certain strategies for teachers in linguistically diverse classrooms to achieve congruence between teaching and learning:

Learning Traits	Teaching Strategies
Directed attention	Make students decide to a attend to learning tasks
Repetition	Make students repeat or rehearse learning tasks
Note Taking	Write down main ideas, important points, ..etc.
Deduction	Apply rules to a given task
Imagery	Use visual, and sensory experiences
Contextualization	Teach meaningfully according to the situation/context
Inferencing	Use hints to encourage predictions
Cooperation	Make students work with their peers cooperatively
Affective style	Possess interpersonal communication skills

Whatever the case may be, learning styles are manifested in the interactional process of individuals with the environment. In a school setting, learning styles indicate how learners are engaged to substantiate knowledge and solve problems. Learning styles can be part of the individual's culture as well as innate faculties. In fact, learning styles are carved in the "deep structure of neutral organization and personality" that are molded by human "development and the cultural experiences of the home, school, and society" (Keefe & Langios, p.1).

It must be pointed out that all definitions of learning styles are equally significant in meeting the unique demands of the learning/teaching situation. Thus, the understanding of the variables affecting learning is fruitful for educators and teachers. In short, effective schooling is keenly linked to the unique linguistic, cognitive and social characteristics of learners especially those who represent an array of cultural and linguistic groups. Indeed, the learner's characteristics are the general framework within which they socialize and interact. Thus, the development of children's preferred ways of learning is intricately related to their culture. This underlies the following discussion of learning styles with implications for teaching in culturally diverse settings.

Learning Styles: Sociocultural Considerations

The recent bulk of research has investigated the relationship between learning styles in terms of the relevant sociocultural experiences of children and their interaction with the environment around them (Kolb, 1984; Kleinfeld, 1992; Irvine & York, 1995). These experiences vary considerably from one individual to another and from one group to another. These differences are evident in the salient features of behavior as they relate to one's culture, language, religion, values, . . .etc. It's worthwhile to discuss some of these sociocultural variables as they affect learning.

Notwithstanding, culture is an overarching framework within which children interact and learn; it is a way of life encompassing a set of variables--acquired or learned--that determine the behavior of individuals and groups (Kolb, 1984; Kleinfeld, 1992). Over the years, there has never been a single construct that accurately defines culture. Yet, the consensus among researchers is that culture influences one learns (Nieto, 1996; Manning & Baruth, 1996; Bennett, 1995; Banks, 1994; Ogbu, 1995). In fact, culture shapes the prior background information and clusters of behaviors of individuals as accepted norms of the group. Learning is intricately related to these patterns and social norms. The knowledge of the learner's culture consequently helps in becoming more sensitive to the educational needs of students.

The social environment in which children interact is also a major factor in shaping the way children learn (Kolb, 1984; Kleinfeld, 1992). Interestingly enough, children pick up their learning patterns as they creatively engage with people around them in trying to solve real life problems (Bermudez, 1986). Such strategies are usually reinforced by adults in terms of what is acceptable in their culture. The context of the learning task is determined by the inherent communication and interactional patterns dictated by the cultural codes and parameters (Hall, 1989). These undoubtedly vary from one culture to another, and influence the way one learns.

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As a major component of culture, language plays a significant role in shaping the the learning process. Sociolinguistic variables cannot be underscored in understanding learning styles. Although all languages are cast to the same mold of similarities at the deeper level, languages vary from one another at the surface aspects ranging from phonological and morphological to syntactic and semantic forms. Similarly, learning tends to be universal across human cultures, but the way learning is approached varies in terms of linguistically-bound behaviors of individuals and communities. Language seems to shape learning as learning is shaped by language. Consequently, the mechanisms of a given language my help us understand certain unique dynamics of learning.

Since students come to schools reflecting diverse sociocultural and sociolinguistic backgrounds, educational practices should take into consideration these aspects as they influence learning and teaching. To engage all students in a more meaningful educational and intellectual discourse, equitable educational practices should value these differences. Unfortunately, linguistically and culturally diverse student populations' unique learning styles have not been adequately addressed in the educational solutions in the American public schools (Ogbu, 1995; Swisher, 1992; Swisher & Deyhle, 1989), thus providing a partial explanation of the failure of these students (Irvine & York, 1995; Ogbu, 1988, 1995).

Accordingly, the dissemination of knowledge, information, and insights about learning styles helps to create an approach that is sensitive to the different learning styles in today's diverse classroom (Ogbu, 1995). This information should be the basis for action and change: teach for learning styles. When teachers understand the different ways of learning, they will be able to adjust their teaching consistently with the expectations of their students. Recognizing various issues on learning styles management, diagnosis and assessment, surveys and instruments, . . . will help extend the linguistically diverse classroom from "student-centered" to "student-empowered," (Reid, 1995).

Learning Styles: A Multicultural Perspective

Multicultural education is a comprehensive approach that aims to multiply learning opportunities for all participants and celebrate the cultural diversity represented in various educational and social institutions (Manning & Baruth, 1996). In particular, it permeates the curriculum and teaching methods including the socialization and interactional processes among participants in the culture of schools (Banks, 1994; Nieto, 1996). Furthermore, the content and methodology of multicultural education must be founded on a philosophical base that reflects a clear understanding of cultural pluralism and its relationship to learning and teaching (Grant & Gomez, 1996). The theoretical and pedagogical foci of multicultural approaches are centered on integration of multicultural education into not only a specific unit or course but in all content areas in a systematic and vastly expansive manner (Grant, 1995; Banks, 1995). The implementation of these primarily rests on teachers, curriculum, and the culture of the academic institution.

In its essence, multicultural education is not only a panacea for problems that plagued our educational institutions, but also an education that empowers teachers and students alike through acquiring a universal perspective of the human reality. This requires teachers to develop a global and multi-faceted perspectives in their teaching as they develop novel plans for instruction. The first step toward actualizing the multicultural curriculum through teaching activities is building an additive level of multiculturalism in teachers (Nieto, 1996). On one hand, teachers need to recognize their biases and confront them, because these are overtly or covertly incubated in the interactional patterns given the monocultural stratification of the society at large (Nieto, 1996; Grant, 1995). On the other hand, teachers must view the world of reality from multiple perspectives and a variety of ways so as not to plunge their students into learning only "one right way" (Bennett, 1995).

If teachers are to promote global and multicultural perspectives in their teaching, they will need to develop new plans of instruction and content delivery. Teachers can work with students and collaborate with educators in myriad ways to create a communal

culture the classroom. To do so, curriculum and teaching should be deeply rooted in and keenly linked to the students' experiences and needs (Manning & Baruth, 1996; Nieto, 1996). Among the most effective ways to achieve the balance between students' needs and pedagogy is to center the curricular and extracurricular activities around the unique cultures of all students as they connect to the broader society. In order to make classrooms laboratories for a more just society, implementing diversity in the curriculum and teaching must be a daily ritual. For instance, in a classroom setting, teachers might engage their students in developing a "classtory"--a history of the class-- whereby portraits and autobiographies of each participant in the class highlight their sociocultural traits embedded in their frames of reference, values and traditions, languages, cognitive and communication styles, and other interactional patterns (Nieto, 1996; Banks, 1995). Also, teachers should engage their students in a meaningful educational discourse on daily basis; this requires teachers and students to discuss relevant issues in an effort to substantiate meanings together through a dialogue in a positive atmosphere. Historical and current issues, for example, should be critically analyzed in terms of our future vision in an informative and pragmatic manner.

An educational reform within a multicultural framework requires productive changes not only in the content of curriculum, but also in the teaching practices and social structure of the classroom. Thus, a sound multicultural pedagogy should be based on "culturally correct" teaching methods and curricula that account for such conditions as sensitivity, empathy, relevance and effectiveness (Grant & Gomez, 1996). First, through the use of culturally sensitive materials and techniques students' academic achievement in all areas will increase. Once teachers effectively demonstrate a careful understanding of the learning situation, their students' motivation will be increased. Second, to assume their responsibility to be empathetic, teachers in diverse settings must decenter themselves through an increased ethnic consciousness among people and members of different groups

that exist interdependently, and thus, help depolarize interethnic hostility and conflict in the classroom (Suzuki, 1984).

Most importantly, culturally relevant curriculum and instructional techniques should relate personally and experientially to the cognitive, academic, social, and linguistic abilities of students. Since these vary from one student to another, teachers are encouraged to diversify the teaching methods and use of teaching aids to address different avenues of learning; sameness in teaching for all will guarantee educational inequity for many (Cortés, 1990). Students should see themselves in the curriculum as valued members of the multicultural society; textbooks, and literature, and materials must be free from any misinformation and bias, nor should they perpetuate prejudicial and negative stereotypical images about the groups they represent. Also, the effective implementation of multicultural teaching must be approached as a long-term process that will not produce dramatic, overnight changes in the academic institutions. Finally, providing the best education for all requires us to utilize multicultural resources and increase the involvement of parents to establish a dynamic equilibrium between home and school.

A curriculum and teaching model based on multicultural principles can guide and empower teachers as they select the subject matter content relevant to their students. Also, this model allows participants to set pertinent educational goals and objectives conducive to students' attitudes and motivation. Once schools and academic institutions give credence to all students' cultures and their contributions to humanity through multicultural curricular activities and instructional strategies, desired promising educational outcomes will follow. These are: enhancing students' self concept, augmenting their motivation, affirming our society's democratic pluralism, and appreciating cultural diversity.

In short, the multicultural pedagogical implications and classroom activities are based on information about learning styles. To bridge the gap between theory and practice, several applications, the most important of which is "culture-sensitive pedagogy," of learning styles research help in planning and instruction in linguistically diverse

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classrooms. Such culturally and linguistically congruent techniques provide students with conditions for effective learning and language development as students are motivated in a positive affective learning environment.

Adapting Teaching to Multicultural Learning Styles

For teachers to develop a teaching style which is responsive to the wide variety of students in their classes, and achieve an equilibrium in the teaching/learning process, the first step is the teacher's awareness of the unique learning styles of his/her students. This has always been articulated by practitioner working in diverse settings. For example, one of the most fundamental dimensions of multicultural education is the knowledge construction process which relates to "the extent to which teachers help students to understand, investigate and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of references, perspective, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it" (Banks, 1994, p. 5). This knowledge would help teachers to design instruction and curriculum to match the learning styles of the students. Also, teachers must promote different learning styles in their students to enhance their learning. In short, the teacher's input in the classroom plays a central role in the final outcome of the student's learning experiences. This input-output balance can be achieved when the expectations of teachers and students match.

Some suggest that successful teachers adapt their teaching to students' learning styles in terms of "enlightened eclecticism" whereby the teacher changes his teaching strategies to meet the learning demands of all students (Hammerly, 1987). In other words, teachers tend to select teaching strategies that are compatible with the way students learn effectively. This requires teachers to select a variety of teaching styles to make students aware of different strategies to learn. It has been assumed that people don't resist change, but they resist being changed. Yet, both teachers and learners must be receptive to changing their strategies in the teaching/learning process. This involves effectively

engaging everybody in the learning process by creating some conditions to maintain a positive and productive learning environment. The most important condition is establishing congruence between the teacher's style and the student's motivation (i.e., when learning styles and teaching strategies match). Since learners influence the way teachers teach, a behavioral modification should be an impetus for congruency in diverse learning environments.

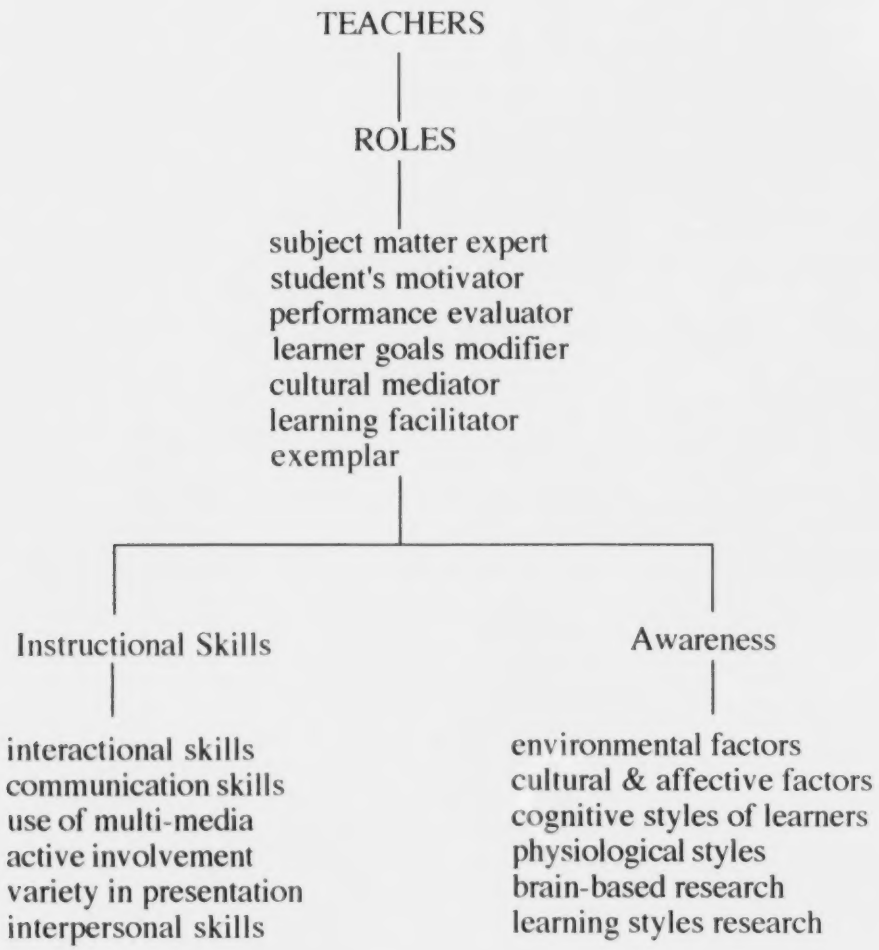
Since multicultural teaching rests on the philosophical underpinnings of multiplying learning opportunities for all learners, congruence between learning and teaching should be achieved in many ways. In linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, teachers can teach for diverse learning styles in many ways. The following strategies may help teachers in creating a learning/teaching environment conducive to the unique learning styles of their students:

1. Asking students about their preferred ways of learning.
2. Using all aspects of language in carrying out learning tasks.
3. Using all cues (contextual, linguistic etc.) in the learning situation.
4. Emphasizing all forms of learning (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, sensory etc.).
5. Incorporating multimedia instructional activities.
6. Using cooperative learning activities in small and large groups.
7. Individualizing instruction, and conferencing with individual students.
8. Focusing on knowledge acquisition inclass and outside the class.
9. Believing that all students are capable of learning and achieving.
10. Repeating seemingly difficult learning tasks.
11. Avoiding repeating what students can get on their own.
12. Contextualizing all learning activities.
13. Using an eclectic teaching approach.
14. Providing a comprehensible input in the classroom.
15. Encouraging questioning and critical thinking.

16. Using multi-modality assessment techniques.

However, a multicultural approach to teaching to diverse learning styles does not mean treating children unequally; it means, according to Swisher (1992, p. 76), attending to students' needs and treating them "equitably and fairly rather than equally or the same." In fact, teaching multiculturally is a way of celebrating and valuing students' differences. It is also a way of assessing students in terms of their potential and capability of what they can do, rather than what they can not do. It should also be borne in mind that school success in a multicultural setting must emphasize what both teachers and students do (Ogbu, 1995).

Consequently, the role of teachers in today's diverse classroom has to be revisited in light of pluralizing the school's culture. The following diagram illustrates the role of the teachers in relation to their instructional styles and strategies, and students' ways of learning.



Furthermore, teachers should take into account the students' learning styles as well as students' circumstances and other characteristics when selecting literature, textbooks and study materials, reading assignments, and most importantly when teaching. All of these should be keenly linked to the students' experiences and sociocultural characteristics. Teachers should be sensitive to the different real life situations of their students; to always include somebody, teachers should mold their teaching style in accordance with the learning style of each student and incorporate the multiple-style technique as they use

different complementary teaching methods and techniques; teachers need to adapt their teaching styles to suit the learning style of all their students.

Finally, teaching for learning styles in diverse settings contributes to the success of linguistically different children and enhances their self-esteem and motivation. It also helps teachers confront their biases and redirect their energies to create an optimal learning environment for their students.

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